

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Progress of the social service professions in South Africa's developmental social welfare system: Social work, and child and youth care work

Mel Gray¹  | Antoinette Lombard² 

¹School of Humanities and Social Science, University of Newcastle, Callaghan, New South Wales, Australia

²Department of Social Work & Criminology, University of Pretoria, Hatfield, South Africa

Correspondence

Mel Gray, School of Humanities and Social Science, University of Newcastle, Callaghan, NSW 2308, Australia.

Email: Mel.Gray@newcastle.edu.au

Abstract

This paper examines the progress of the social service professions delivering developmental social welfare in South Africa, a subject we have followed closely over the last 20 years. Being policy-driven, developmental social welfare stemmed from expert social analyses that resulted in technically oriented solutions, including the broadening of social service professions. Twenty years on, it is hard to see developmental social welfare, as envisaged in government policy, in action, since the practice reality does not differ drastically from the prior apartheid system with the government's heavy reliance on social security as a poverty-alleviation measure. The expanded social security budget has led to underfunded services and a crisis for social service professionals. This paper focuses on the regulated professions of social workers, and child and youth care workers. Our examination of critical issues for these occupational groups revealed that South Africa still has a long way to go in building a strong social service workforce.

KEYWORDS

child and youth care, developmental social welfare, social and economic justice, social welfare policy, social work, South Africa, workforce issues in human services

Abbreviations: CDW, community development worker; CYC, child and youth care; CYCC, child and youth care centre; CYCW, child and youth care work; DPSA, Department of Public Service and Administration; DSD, Department of Social Development; FET, Further Education and Training; HWSETA, Health and Welfare Sector Education Training Authority; IFSW, International Federation for Social Workers; NACCW, National Association of Child Care Workers; NASW: SA, National Association for Social Workers: South Africa; NDP, National Development Plan; NQF, National Qualifications Framework; OSD, Occupation Specific Dispensation; PBCYCW, Professional Board for Child and Youth Care Work; RSA, Republic of South Africa; SACSSP, South African Council of Social Service Professions; SSP, social service profession.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa's foray into developmental social welfare is of interest to other postcolonial contexts where poverty is rife, fuelled by violent conflicts, government failures, and social and economic exclusion. Developmental social welfare is a policy strategy for the poor designed to enlist their participation in development activities to achieve 'social and economic justice, human rights, social solidarity and active citizenship' (Patel, 2005, p. 73). It rests on proactive collaboration between government and its partners in civil society to achieve its goals of sustainable

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social, economic, and human development. Further, in the interests of reconciliation, Abdullah (2015) believed developmental social welfare sought to heal and transform whole communities. Its goals notwithstanding, in all its iterations, developmental social welfare, was policy-driven; it stemmed from expert social analyses that resulted in technically oriented solutions, including developments within the evolving social service professions, the subject of this paper.

In examining the progress of the social service professions within developmental social welfare in South Africa, we aim to show how well intentioned policies have left the two major professions we discuss—social work and child and youth care work—in disarray. We have followed this progress closely over the last 20 years appreciative of the mammoth task the government undertook in transforming the welfare system to be more inclusive, just, fair, and equitable (Gray, 2000, 2006; Gray & Lombard, 2008; Gray & Mazibuko, 2002; Lombard, 2000, 2005, 2008). Twenty years ago, each of the authors published papers on the development of the social service professions, up to the turn of the millennium. Gray (2000) was critical of the political process through which the childcare movement won government support at the expense of social work in the transformation of the social service professions in the 1990s, perceiving the marginalisation of and loss of support for social work. Lombard (2000) saw this as a time for greater accountability, and risk, for social workers. On her account, Gray (2000) had misread the context shaping these changes. She claimed that ‘if social workers are not aware of the context that shapes and develops social work as a profession, they may start to believe that social work is losing its status as a profession. This belief may contribute to a perception of social work as being marginalised’ (p. 313). Despite these differing views, both authors saw social development as an opportunity for social work and, over the years, have contributed to the scholarship on social work’s adaptation to, and the progress of, developmental social welfare. This paper continues their engagement with the progress of two leading social service professions in South Africa, namely, social work and child and youth care work. It begins with a brief discussion of the social service professions generally, then examines developments in social work and child and youth care work’s progress in developmental social welfare, highlighting critical issues for each professional group, before ending with a way forward involving greater interprofessional collaboration.

SOCIAL SERVICE PROFESSIONS

The massive policy change that sparked the transformation of the social services professions was the advent

Key Practitioner Message

- The difficulties of welfare transformation and implications for practice.
- The challenges facing social service practitioners.
- Dangers of policy-driven responses that fail to address practitioner issues.

of developmental social welfare. To make way for the inclusion of new occupational categories as part of the broader process of democratisation, the White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, 1997) (hereafter the White Paper) created a broader umbrella—through the South African Council of Social Service Professions (SACSSP), hereafter the Council—by bringing in legitimate occupational groups excluded under apartheid (Gray & Mazibuko, 2002). The broadened social service professions included social workers, child and youth care workers (CYCWs), and community development workers (CDWs). Specialisations within social work include adoption social work, occupational social work, clinical social work, probation work, and forensic social work (SACSSP, n.d.).

Other than social work, the new occupational groups were less organised than social work and did not have professional status, despite the nomenclature of social service professions. Though social workers were active in child protection, there were many childcare workers employed in the childcare sector, especially in residential institutions, who lacked formal training (Gray & Gannon, 1998; Thumbadoo, 2013). There was also a growing number of CDWs within an occupational category without professional organisation and formal education programs. These untrained workers did their best to address complex problems, often beyond their capacity and skills (Gray & Wint, 1998). They did not have access to the merit-based higher education programs available for social workers. CYCWs and CDWs had far to go to catch up to social work in terms of professional organisation and education at the turn of the millennium, while social workers had to find ways to adapt education and practice to keep pace with policy-driven developmental welfare (Gray & Mazibuko, 2002). Further, the development of the CYC and community development workforce aligned with other government priorities, such as reducing the cost of social services and the appropriate deployment of professional skills.

The recent Government Gazetted Draft Social Service Practitioners Bill (DSD, 2020a) called for the establishment of the South African Council for Social Service Practitioners, heralding a change in nomenclature once again—from social

service professionals to social service practitioners. Like its predecessor, the renamed Council would comprise constituent professional boards that determined registration requirements and disciplinary procedures for their respective social service professions. The Bill defined the categories of practitioners requiring registration for practice and the Council's powers in relation to professional registration, and education, training, and development. Though the existing statutory Council encompassed two legally constituted professional boards—for social workers, since its inception, and CYCWs, since 2015—it recognised three categories of social service professionals. The third was CDWs, the subject of a paper in preparation, hence not discussed herein, that remained on the periphery of the legally constituted social service professions. The Bill defined CYCWs and social workers, discussed below, as follows:

‘Child and youth care worker’ means a registered social service practitioner who interacts with children and youth, providing holistic care, therapeutic, developmental, educational and recreational programmes that promote and enhance optimum development including practitioners providing supervisory and management support services (DSD, 2020a, p. 7).

‘Social worker’ means a registered social service practitioner who may practise with individuals or communities and groups, to promote social change, build capacity in human relationships, enhance social functioning and advocate for social justice, including supervisory and management support functions (DSD, 2020a, p. 10).

PROGRESS IN DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL WORK

Looking back at our interpretation of the situation over 20 years ago (Gray, 2000; Lombard, 2000) and subsequent events, though policy pushed a developmental social welfare agenda, it did not take account of the high costs—financial and otherwise—of the substantive changes it envisaged. While appreciative of the importance of a national policy framework, the government's failure to provide an accurately costed strategic plan for the conversion of its structures and workforce to a developmental welfare system led to a further embedding of past structures and practices, including statutory services requiring casework interventions and social security absorbing the lion's share of the welfare budget. This discussion of the progress of social work towards developmental social

welfare examines policy, professional, workforce, and practice issues. It aims to show that insufficient government support for its developmental welfare agenda thwarted social work's attempts to respond to policy changes; the way in which social work's milestone achievement of professional unity in 2007 dissipated leaving the profession's organisational structure in tatters; workplace pressures that did not support the developmental welfare agenda kept social workers rooted in statutory casework, especially in child protection, with impossible caseloads, while, despite attempts to draw new members into the profession, social workers were leaving, feeling demoralised and undervalued; and how policy change thwarted social workers' broader engagement in developmental social welfare through community development practice, with the most recent changes in child welfare policy consolidating their role in child protection.

Policy issues

The policy-driven transformation of the social service professions meant that the government, rather than the profession, defined social work's role in developmental welfare (Gray & Lombard, 2008; Mazibuko & Gray, 2004; RSA, 1978). It also meant that the extent to which social work could achieve expected policy goals depended on government resourcing of the changes it required. The government challenged social workers to adapt their methods and approaches to respond to the demands of developmental welfare and called on them to focus on alleviating poverty and redressing social and economic injustice (Chereni, 2017; Gray & Mazibuko, 2002; Hölscher, 2008; Lombard, 2000; Patel, 2005). Developmental welfare accentuated the social change functions of social work. It required social workers to engage in processes to increase equality and foster socioeconomic inclusion, including empowerment, advocacy, social investment, and community development (Lombard & Twikirize, 2014).

The White Paper (RSA, 1997) created the expectation that the government would introduce programs to address poverty. However, as Hölscher (2008) observed, the government lacked ‘the political will’ (p. 144) to fund the substantive changes this would require opting instead for limited, targeted, ameliorative measures, and ‘increased social security spending’ (Hölscher, 2008, p. 144). The low impact of cash transfers notwithstanding, Frye and Kirsten (2012) argued that the government's ill-preparedness to tackle the structural causes of poverty and inequality reduced developmental social work's transformative potential and made it highly unlikely that it would meet its developmental objectives in the contemporary policy

environment (Chereni, 2017; Engelbrecht & Strydom, 2015; Hölscher, 2008; Mbecke, 2016; Patel & Hochfeld, 2013). As Engelbrecht and Strydom (2015) observed, the government's failure to implement social development as envisaged in the White Paper (RSA, 1997) limited social work's potential impact on developmental social welfare. They were critical of the heavy reliance on direct payments characteristic of welfare states in other parts of the world. Patel and Hochfeld (2013) likewise observed that the government's macroeconomic policies had not created a conducive environment for social development, hampered also by its under-funding of developmental welfare services and 'continuity with past patterns of service delivery' (Patel & Hochfeld, 2013, p. 699), such as statutory interventions, residential care, and casework.

The White Paper review (DSD, 2016) bore out some of these criticisms. The review committee found widespread confusion about the concept of developmental social welfare, while noting the importance of comprehensive social protection, including social work services for vulnerable and at-risk groups. It attributed some of this confusion to the absence of national social development legislation, which contributed to uneven funding, resourcing, and staffing across the provinces and the underfunding of essential social welfare services. It called *inter alia* for a national social development act aligned with the National Development Plan, adequate resourcing for an expanded service system, standardised data collection to aid planning, and comprehensive social security. It nevertheless found improvements in racial equity in service distribution and employment practices though highlighted the need for specialised skills in areas of complex need like child protection, mental health, substance abuse and addictions, child neglect, elder abuse, family violence, and trauma, where levels of professional provision were grossly inadequate. The committee reported that the general social development professional workforce lacked specialist knowledge and treatment skills to deal with these complex issues (DSD, 2016). This finding was not surprising, since universities trying to respond to policy change and adapt their curricula to developmental social welfare had turned to a more generalist social work approach without focusing too heavily on casework specialisations, such as child protection and mental health, as borne out by research findings on an ill-prepared workforce discussed below.

Professional issues

Besides the developmental policy environment, there were professional issues facing social work when the White Paper came into force in 1997. Gray (2000) believed that

the most pressing challenge for social work going into the new millennium was professional unity. The most significant milestone for social work, following years of racial division in the profession, was the establishment of the now-defunct National Association for Social Workers (NASW): South Africa in 2007, which ended the country's international isolation and gained its unquestioned membership of the International Federation for Social Workers (IFSW). Charged with, among other things, uniting social workers and enhancing the profession's image, it had much to do in addressing social work's longstanding, excessive preoccupation with its low professional status and its historical gatekeeping to shut other occupations out of the sector through legislation. Though it made great strides towards professional unity, there were 'frightening ghosts' (Damons, 2015, p. 70) dogging its progress, not least matters of race. However, the demise of social work's shortlived professional unification resulted from a mystifying series of events, as this following account shows.

In 2013, the newly elected executive began its term and, for the first time, opened an NASW office in the business hub of Edenvale in Gauteng. Then, in 2015, members received invitations to roundtable breakfast discussions, for which a registration fee was required. Given the service ethos of the professional association to which fee-paying members were accustomed, this turn of events raised concerns. The subsequent invitations to selected supervision experts, even though supervision was a relevant topic in social work at the time, again raised concerns due to a lack of engagement with members on these planned activities. When the executive failed to call for membership renewal, even on request, its change in direction from a professional membership-based association to a corporate body became clear. The president continued to accept invitations to speak and respond on behalf of the association, running a one-man show, supported by an elected official. While the national association had become defunct, when further elections and membership renewal did not eventuate, some regional associations, such as the Western Cape branch, remained active, though others disbanded. Concerned about South Africa's membership, the IFSW reached out in 2017, engaging in personal consultations with the non-official president and executive members. There had been no biannual general meetings and elections since 2013 or IFSW fee payments for several years, though South Africa remained a non-active member.

In early 2018, social workers received an email calling for membership renewal in a category-based fee structure for social workers, social auxiliary workers, social work students, and partially or fully retired pioneer social workers. For example, the joining fee for social workers was R500 in addition to an annual registration fee of R1200, a total of R1700.00 at a time when the SACCP's compulsory annual

registration fee was R400. The new 13-page membership application, with its underpinning questionnaire, read like a contract, while the revived association was unconstitutional since members had not elected its office-bearers.

The NASW, which had started out as an internationally accepted unified professional association, had become a not-for-profit voluntary organisation on a quest for financial independence. In 2019, the then unconstitutional president made an official statement that social workers in South Africa were not interested in an association for social work. Thereafter, the covid pandemic thwarted plans to redeem the situation forcing social workers to accept that the NASW: SA was beyond redemption, though its Facebook page remained active with almost 7000 members. By losing its unified professional voice, the profession has marginalised itself and diluted its capacity to contribute to, and advocate for, developmental social welfare. To date, South Africa does not have a national representative association for social workers.

Workforce issues

Social work's professional organisation crumbled, while overloaded social workers' working conditions deteriorated, as they struggled to adapt to the developmental welfare legislation in oppressive work environments (Cock, 2008). In fostercare, for example, social work caseloads had reached 2000 (Barberton et al., 2006). Excessive caseloads and unfavourable working conditions raised concerns about social workers' safety and security, amid constant complaints about poor salaries, staff shortages, a high staff turnover, under-resourcing, and burnout (Alpaslan & Schenck, 2012; DSD, 2016; Lukelo, 2004; Malan & Rothman, 2002; Moloi, 2012; Naidoo & Kasiram, 2003; Schenck, 2004; Skhosana, 2020). As a result, an alarming number of social workers were leaving the profession to pursue a different career path or employment overseas, while social workers entering practice unprepared for stressful work environments exacerbated retention problems (de Jager, 2013).

In response, to expand workforce numbers, the government introduced social work bursaries and improved compensation packages in keeping with national occupation-specific guidelines. Though the number of trained social workers grew from 9072 to 18,213 between 2000 and 2014, many graduates remained unemployed (Democratic Alliance, 2022; DSD, 2019b, 2020b; Jamieson et al., 2014; Khan, 2022; RSA, 2021). The Minister for Social Development reported that there were 8873 unemployed social work graduates, of whom the DSD had funded 4829 (RSA, 2021). Thus, with a social work workforce of less

than 10,000 employed by the DSD, not all of whom worked with children and families, social workers in statutory child protection were overloaded, with exceedingly high, unmanageable caseloads (de Jager, 2013; DSD, 2019a; Earle, 2008; Kleijn, 2004; Mohamed, 2005; Soji, 2005). Thus, while the Children's Act allowed all registered social service professionals to engage in developmental work, such as prevention, early intervention, and family support, social workers overburdened with statutory child protection responsibilities lacked the time to perform these functions leading to interprofessional tension (Jamieson, 2013).

The DSD attempted to shift tasks to other social service professionals to reduce the burden on social workers and ensure vulnerable children's access to services, despite professional rivalry and discordant interprofessional relationships (DSD, 2012). However, as Jamieson et al. (2014) observed, some government officials believed only social workers could perform prevention and early intervention functions designated for CYCWs and were reluctant to engage in task shifting. Thus, educating officials about the value of task shifting between social workers and CYCWs was important. The White Paper review also noted that DSD had not made the best use of its skilled social workers and had failed to shift tasks, such as administration and foster-care related court work to lower-paid social service professionals and free social workers for direct work with children and families (DSD, 2016).

The review committee also reported that, within the DSD workforce, social workers remained the leading social service professionals. Though, at the time of the review, DSD employed 9598 social workers, there were ongoing claims that social work remained a scarce skill. Interestingly, the Health and Welfare Sector Education Training Authority (HWSETA) (2017) reported that the fact that government positions:

Were (and still are) not filled was the result of a *lack of state funding* and not because of skills shortages. On the contrary, the people needed to fill those vacancies were available and were waiting to be appointed. It can thus be concluded that the need for social workers actually exists at another level and that it is not an expression of skills shortages. The provinces keep on reporting the need because they are scared that if they don't, it will be said that they haven't reported the need and that the funding will never be made available (p. SSP-22 emphasis added).

Table 1 shows that the total SSP workforce of 18,498 collectively comprised 55% of the DSD workforce

TABLE 1 DSD workforce at the time of the White Paper review (DSD, 2016)

Social service profession (SSP)	Number		%	Other % ^a	% DSD workforce
	Total	Frontline			
Social workers	9598	8129	85	15	29
Social auxiliary workers	2753	2753	100	0	8
CYCWs	3818	3818	93	7	11
CDWs	2329	1993	99	1	7
Total	18,498	16,693	N/A	N/A	55

^aIn management, supervision, policy development and administrative roles.

(DSD, 2016); it included 2573 social auxiliary workers, 3818 CYCWs, and 2329 CDWs.

Despite the DSD's projected increase in registered social workers from 9072 in 2000 to 18,213 in 2014, following the government's recruitment and retention scheme, the review committee reported that, based on registrations with the Council, only 56% of registered social workers were employed in March 2012. There was thus a wastage of skilled human resources, due mainly to a lack of state funding (HWSETA, 2017) leading to unattractive salary and service conditions and stressful work environments for social workers. However, social workers were not employed solely in DSD or government generally, though this was reputedly the largest employer. Some were employed in the higher education sector, others in some of the 231,000 non-profit organisations registered with the DSD (2020c). Though there were 36,991 social workers, 12,352 social auxiliary workers, 14,636 student social workers, and 11,609 student social auxiliary workers registered with the SACSSP (2021a), the majority were not in the workforce.

Practice issues

For some time during the transformation to developmental social welfare, it seemed that community development—with its ethos of democratic, people-centred, participation and empowerment, *Ubuntu*-based mutual aid, and economic self-reliance—would be the practice of choice for developmental social workers. However, two policy changes thwarted this expectation. First was the change in government policy in 2005, which transferred the community development load to CDWs, many of whom were social workers, in the Department of Provincial and Local Government (Gray, 2010; Marais & Botes, 2006; Martin, 2014; Mundau & Tanga, 2017; Raga et al., 2012; South African Management Development Institute, 2005; Westoby, 2014; Westoby & Botes, 2013). This policy change made social workers vulnerable to criticism that they were not

fulfilling their developmental mandate, a task made increasingly difficult by the DSD and allied nongovernment organisations employing them to meet the ever-growing demand for statutory casework.

This was borne out by the second, more recent, policy change, when the National Child Care and Protection Policy (DSD, 2019a) consolidated social workers' role in child protection—investigations, assessments, placements, and supervision of placements—in relation to adoption, foster-care, and residential care. The DSD's (2022) brief confirmed social workers' role in welfare services for families and communities, including women, children, young people, older people, and people with disabilities. Despite the language of poverty reduction, empowerment, and integrated sustainable development in developmental social welfare policy documents, key foci included statutory child protection, gender-based violence, home-based aged care, and services to people with disabilities and families with vulnerable children, while community interventions became synonymous with home-based care. While workplace pressures towards statutory casework prevented social work's transition to developmental interventions for the poor, educational institutions, nevertheless, adapted their curricula for developmental social work (Earle, 2008; Engelbrecht & Strydom, 2015; Patel & Hochfeld, 2013; van Breda, 2018; van Breda & Addinall, 2021).

To conclude this section, social workers could not reach neglected rural and poor communities starved for services without significant government resourcing and structural change. Though the government attempted to reduce social work caseloads, the 60-case international norm remained well out of reach, while the scholarship program did little to ease the situation (DSD, 2016). Social work curricula teaching developmental interventions increased the risk that social workers would enter the profession ill prepared for government-designated statutory social work (casework) positions. Khan (2022) provided an apt summary of the situation:

Human resources in the form of social and child care workers are essential to provide

adequate services to children and families. In 2007 the Department of Social Development set out on an ambitious plan to fund the training of social workers. However due to fiscal constraints, 7000 unemployed social workers are registered on the department's database which excludes the 5000 unemployed who benefitted through a scholarship programme (Department of Social Development, 2019). Despite the projections made by the National Development Plan to encompass the employment of 55,000 social services practitioners by the end of 2030, the need to meet current needs, is dire (p. 73).

There was clear evidence that the DSD was concerned about the number of unemployed social workers and, with less than 10,000 on its payroll, meeting the NDP 2030 goal seemed somewhat out of reach without a substantial human resource budget allocation, which was highly unlikely (DSD, 2019b, 2020b).

PROGRESS IN CHILD AND YOUTH CARE

In South Africa, child and youth care fall within the broad umbrella of child welfare, though intersect with child protection, running residential institutions (homes) and after-care centres for children placed there under the Children's Act 38 of 2005. The developmental child welfare approach calls for integrated service delivery focused on prevention, early intervention, statutory child protection, and re-integration and aftercare services (Strydom et al., 2020). However, the service-delivery system leaned heavily towards child protection with a strong focus 'on legislation and statutory pressure to shield children from maltreatment' (Strydom et al., 2020, p. 384). Within this complex system, delineating who does what, or who should be doing what, has proved a thorny task. In the 1980s, most CYCWs found employment in residential institutions, though, in the 1990s, in keeping with developmental child welfare extended their services to vulnerable children and young people in the community, who lacked access to institutional care. However, as the following discussion shows, while adopted in theory, a lack of adequate funding and resourcing for public and private services, compounded by an absence of coordinated, integrated service delivery hampered a developmental child welfare approach (Strydom et al., 2020). This section shows that, despite a strong push towards professionalisation, CYC has been unable to develop a strong professionally trained and registered workforce to the extent that it is now a

profession in crisis. Through an account of an emergency summit, it details the policy, professionalisation, workforce, and practice issues that led to this crisis.

Policy issues

In 2019, the DSD (2019a) introduced the National Child Care and Protection Policy to provide direction and articulate the requirements for the development and delivery of an effective continuum of child care and protection services (DSD, 2021b). While it consolidated social workers' role in child protection, it reinforced CYCWs' role in residential institutions—called Child and Youth Care Centres (CYCCS)—and community-based programs, like *Isibindi*, noting there were 11,105 children in CYCCs in 2014 (DSD, 2019a). The policy did little to clarify the role of CYCWs in CYCCs and community-based care other than to align social workers with statutory child protection and CYCCs with statutory residential childcare. In light of the discussion that follows, this new child welfare policy is unlikely to mitigate the woes of CYCWs in developmental social welfare.

Professional issues

The National Association of Child Care Workers (NACCW), established in 1975 as a progressive, anti-apartheid organisation, played a key role in the professionalisation of CYC work. When the Council finally made provision for the registration of CYCWs in 2015 (Molepo & Delpert, 2015), following a 30-year struggle, the NACCW had 44,000 active members (DSD, 2016; Jamieson, 2013). It has and continues to be a major force in training and professional development, supporting and nurturing its workers, offering leadership development programs, disseminating knowledge and best practice models, and advocating for CYCWs (AIDSTAR Two, 2013; Coulsen, 2009; Thurman et al., 2009).

In keeping with developmental welfare, CYC expanded its work beyond residential care into the community, moving increasingly towards the provision of prevention and early intervention services for children. It developed its indigenous community-based *Isibindi* (meaning courage) program, designed initially to deal with children orphaned by AIDS. In 2013, the NACCW entered into a contract with the DSD to expand this program to train 10,000 community-based workers. Between 2013 and 2018, the program trained community members to provide daily practical support and assistance to more than 1.3 million children (DSD, 2019a; DSD & NACCW, 2014; Jamieson, 2013). Research showed that it

also increased participants' access to social grants, material assistance, and family support (Kvalsvig & Taylor, 2015; Thurman et al., 2013; Visser et al., 2015). However, these gains aside:

The partnership between the DSD and NACCW terminated in 2018 and the projects were handed over to DSD in 2019 based on a new model for community-based services at prevention and early intervention [*Risiha* (meaning resilience) (DSD, 2021a)]. By August 2019 there were only 53 Isibindi Projects employing 1069 CYCWs who were provided with varying stipends to sustain themselves (Department of Social Development, 2019a) (Khan, 2022, pp. 73–74).

Kvalsvig and Taylor's (2015) formative evaluation of the *Isibindi* program found that problems surrounding payment had a negative effect on morale and possibly promoted turnover in the CYCW workforce.

The expectation that professional recognition and regulation would raise the profile and status of CYCWs left many disappointed when this did not eventuate (Jamieson, 2013). Though the professionalisation of CYC work came into effect with registration in 2015, only a fraction of the NACCW's large membership had registered with the Council by 2020, though many were likely still in practice. Perceived as a professional crisis, the NACCW called on the Council to intervene. In conjunction with the Professional Board for CYCW (PBCYCW), the Council engaged key stakeholders in an online summit in May 2021 to discuss the challenges in the sector and agree on a course of action (PBCYCW, 2021). Registered CYCWs had expressed their disillusionment with the Council's ability and efforts to increase registrations and the national DSD and Department of Public Service and Administration's (DPSA) failure to address the problems derailing the growth and standing of the CYC profession that were negatively affecting service delivery in settings employing CYCWs. There were concerns about the underrepresentation of CYC in policymaking, decision-making, and general DSD management and lack of provision for CYC in DSD's national and provincial organisational structures (SACSSP, 2021b).

High-profile stakeholders exposed challenges on a much broader scale, starting with the sector's failure to distinguish between professional, auxiliary, and student CYCWs as stipulated by professional regulations (RSA, 2014). The Deputy Director-General of the Gauteng DSD connected this failure to the shortage of CYC professionals, who constituted only 1.8% of the 8043 registered CYCWs, while the government's planned rollout

of 10,000 auxiliary CYCWs only added to the problem, because, whether professional or auxiliary, they treated all as CYCWs (Jamieson, 2013). This raised questions about the nature and quality of services, particularly for children remaining long-term in CYC centres that mainly employed auxiliary CYCWs. It also pointed to problems in training with CYCWs failing to advance their qualifications, due, in large part, to unresolved workforce issues, as the following discussion shows.

Workforce issues

There was a litany of problems pertaining to workforce issues for CYCWs:

- *The job grades issue:* A longstanding issue created by the Occupation Specific Dispensation (OSD) was its allocation of the same job grades for professional and auxiliary CYCs. Changing this had proved a huge problem since it required a protracted development-and-review process initiated by the DSD with a strong business case, costing new performance levels aligned to the 2014 regulations for CYCWs (RSA, 2014). The DPSA would only approve job categories once the DSD had provided confirmation that there were sufficient funds for their implementation at the provincial and national levels.
- *The professional qualification issue:* Until the new job grades eventuated, there were no incentives for CYCs to gain a professional qualification; hence, only 7% of registered CYCWs were studying for childcare degrees. Most were auxiliary-level students doing the basic level-4 qualification in childcare, while most practising CYCWs had only a high school qualification. To encourage professionalisation, CYCWs needed hierarchical salaries, career paths, and promotional opportunities and public and nongovernment employers' adherence to the Council's registration requirements to employ only registered CYCWs. Finally, without sufficient CYC professionals, social workers were supervising auxiliary CYCWs in the workplace and this was a thorny issue. The low level of professionalisation related directly to limited opportunities for higher-education study, lack of funding, scarcity of employment positions, and absence of human resource planning for CYCWs in all sectors. The Minister of Social Development emphasised the importance of realigning DSD policies and programs to ensure the inclusion of CYCWs in the integrated service delivery model and gave her commitment to a human resource plan stipulating career paths for CYCWs.
- *The CYCWs in the community issue:* As already noted, in keeping with developmental child welfare policy,

CYCWs had extended their services into the community, as demonstrated in the *Isibindi* program. However, many CYCWs in community settings were earning stipends, rather than salaries, and this was affecting morale and workforce retention. In 2020, DSD conducted capacity-building sessions on the implementation guidelines for the *Risiha* program, which would operate through community drop-in-centres providing basic prevention and early intervention services to support the emotional, physical, and social development needs of vulnerable children. DSD (2020c) claimed it had trained 6773 CYCWs in the process, though there was no mention of where they would fit into the service structure or who would pay their salaries.

To respond to these critical issues, the summit appointed working groups to work on the three most pressing issues identified: (i) the sectoral human resource plan with realistic targets and timeframes for implementation, (ii) OSD revision/DSD business case to change job grades and related role descriptions, salary levels, and employment requirements, and (iii) higher education to increase access to university programs (SACSSP, 2021a, 2021b). At the subsequent online summit in May 2022 (SACSSP, 2022a), the DSD reported that only three of the nine provinces had submitted their audit data on CYCWs' qualifications to aid human resource planning and to build the business case for job-grade revision. The higher-education work group had the most to report:

- *University programs:* The Durban University of Technology's four-year Level 8 professional qualifying CYC degree, which had been running since 2015, had provided places for 50 undergraduate students per annum, while there were five student enrolments for Level 9 masters' degrees and two for doctoral studies commencing in 2022 (PBCYCW, 2022). These were small gains to bridge the professional gap and address the huge need for qualified supervisors with a master's qualification. Two universities were in the planning stages to offer four-year professional CYC degrees in the next 2–3 years, the University of Johannesburg and University of South Africa. The former had already made provision for master's and doctoral students (PBCYCW, 2022). However, university access criteria prevented auxiliary workers from enrolling in

professional CYC degrees (PBCYCW, 2021, 2022). Further, the NACCW introduced a certified NQF Level 5 higher certificate CYC qualification in 2020.

- *Bursaries:* HWSETA, the regulating body for the level-4 Further Education and Training (FET) Certificate: Child and Youth Care Work had provided bursaries enabling 1657 auxiliary CYCWs to complete this qualification between 2011 and 2020 (PBCYCW, 2021). It had committed to providing bursaries for professional training and internships, and registration fees for needy candidates (PBCYCW, 2021, 2022). It had appointed a service provider to provide recognition of prior learning (RPL) assessments and top-up training for 350 CYCWs employed by DSD to complete the FET auxiliary CYCW certificate in 2019.

HWSETA (2022) reported on the growing need 'for work-ready and well-trained mid-level workers to share tasks and extend service capacity in the resource-constrained environments of healthcare and social development' (p. 33). Despite these developments, many CYCWs could not afford fees for further study or council registration. Nevertheless, as shown in Table 2, between 2013 and 2020, 6004 auxiliary CYCWs graduated with the basic level-4 qualification in auxiliary CYC work. Overall, there had been a 7.9% growth in registered CYCWs (as compared with just over 5.4% and 5.3% for social workers and social auxiliary workers respectively, between 2016 and 2021).

The SACSSP (2022b) reported that, as of 31 March 2022, there were 200 professional, 8358 auxiliary, and 4055 student CYC registrations. The Council registrar noted, however, the integration of qualified CYCWs into social service workforce required intersectoral collaboration, professional recognition, supervisory support, and workforce training and development for social service professionals to understand the differing roles and responsibilities in the multiprofessional work environment (PBCYCW, 2021).

Practice issues

Like social workers, CYCWs were frequently overloaded, struggling, without support, with managing difficult children in residential institutions, often going from one crisis to another. In their investigation of CYCW, Molepo

TABLE 2 Student output in CYCW qualification overseen by HWSETA: 2013–2020

Qualification	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
FET Certificate NQF L4	521	344	1113	1405	376	480	866	899	6004

Source: HWSETA, 2022, p. 47.

and Delpont (2015) found myriad problems relating to role expectations, lack of recognition, little knowledge about what CYCWs did, inconsistent job requirements, lack of professional growth and development opportunities, inadequate working conditions, and staff: children ratios exceeding 1:20. Findings like these showed that scholars needed to check their facts to avoid unnecessary professional tension. Was it true that CYCWs did prevention, early intervention, and family support because social workers were ‘overburdened with child protection work’ (Jamieson, 2013, p. 6)? Unfolding events would seem to show that, just as social workers were mired in child protection, so, too, were CYCWs in residential facilities. Was it true that social workers focused ‘on knowing about children and families’, while CYCWs focused ‘on living and working with them’ (Anglin, 2001, in Jamieson, 2013, p. 6)? Knowing about children was indispensable to living and working with them, and perhaps managing difficult children might be less onerous if social workers and CYCWs worked together on managing these cases. There were huge opportunities for collaboration, here and in community-based services. One model of community-based interprofessional collaboration is Future Families (n.d.), where social workers, social auxiliary workers, and community-based childcare workers provide programs in healthcare, economic empowerment, gender-based violence, agriculture, and support for displaced people.

To conclude this section, the years of tension between CYCW and social work notwithstanding, this review of progress shows that there is common ground between social work and CYCW. Both professions had human resource problems and a skills scarcity that additional educational programs had not assuaged. Many qualified social service practitioners were leaving their professions, many going overseas, due to the shortage of positions and poor working conditions in the underfunded social service sector (Adlem, 2008; de Jager, 2013; Engelbrecht, 2006; Naidoo & Kasiram, 2006). The NACCW’s heavy focus on training and long fought-for professionalisation had not brought the recognition CYCWs had expected. To embrace developmental welfare, the NACCW had developed a pioneering community-based program that was shortlived, with the number of projects employing CYCWs decreasing over time, with many receiving demoralising stipends rather than salaries. Most CYCWs were employed in residential childcare facilities, as they had been prior to the advent of developmental social welfare and the new childcare policy had done little to change this. The difficulties involved in training CYCWs and providing workplaces that rewarded them accordingly, the rewards of professionalisation, had proved a major challenge and it seemed that the DSD was returning, in no small measure, to a

child protection and childcare system similar to that prior to the advent of developmental welfare policy with its new child welfare policy. Though there were positive developments in the educational sector, the number of professional CYC graduates was small, which might account for DSD’s concerted effort to attract unemployed social work graduates back into the sector. In 2020, the DSD reiterated its commitment to engage accredited CYCWs to perform groundwork that would free social workers to focus on statutory child protection matters (DSD, 2020b). Questions remain, however, about how professional CYCWs would react to doing the groundwork for social workers, who bore the sole responsibility for statutory child protection, as they had always done in South Africa.

CONCLUSION

Although developmental social welfare, as laid out in the White Paper (RSA, 1997), foreshadowed different categories of social service professionals working together towards shared goals, achieving a common understanding of who a social service professional is and clarity on what each profession does has taken years to develop and remains a work in progress (DSD, 2020a). While South Africa has established a raft of policies and frameworks to guide the social service workforce and has made some gains in building the social service professions, a lack of clarity on functions and roles remains, with resultant duplications and omissions (DSD, 2012, 2016). While the White Paper held a vision of a just and equitable welfare system, it lacked an enabling framework and did not have the backing of an act of parliament. Our analysis has shown that furthering the Council’s goal of social service professionals united in service excellence (PBCYCW, 2021) meant addressing the issues of all social service professions and practitioners, which legislation alone could not achieve. This became abundantly clear in the White Paper review. We hope that the Draft White Paper for Social Development—in preparation at the time of writing—would have an accompanying plan providing clarity on the roles and tasks of social service professionals with clear guidelines on interprofessional collaboration and adequate resourcing of the social service workforce to achieve the objectives of developmental social welfare. A recent social sector summit promised a new social compact giving social partners a voice on the path ahead towards integrated social and economic development (RSA, 2022). This promise notwithstanding, this paper has shown that there is still a long way to go in building a strong coordinated professional social service workforce in South Africa.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST


The authors report no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

ORCID

Mel Gray  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9886-5138>

Antoinette Lombard  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1380-2435>

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